

ST MARY'S ELY

Review of the Year 2023



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Celebrating Growth, Gratitude, and Community

Dear Friends,

“Whatever happens, conduct yourselves in a manner worthy of the gospel of Christ. Then, whether I come and see you or only hear about you in my absence, I will know that you stand firm in the one Spirit, striving together as one for the faith of the gospel”

Philippians 1:27

The occasion of our APCM provides us with a fabulous opportunity to celebrate the growth, character, and spirit of community that define our shared sense of mission and ministry.

First and foremost, I want to share heartfelt appreciation to each and every one of you who have contributed to the vibrancy and vitality of St Mary's, whether it be through being part of a ministry team, faithful praying, generous support, or your fellowship and companionship extended to others in sharing faith. Despite facing ongoing changes and challenges, our community has remained steadfast in its commitment to our mission and vision. I am immensely grateful for the sense in which the ministry and mission of the church feels like 'ours', and am always delighted by the dedication and commitment of our members and volunteers. Though we often recognise the need for more volunteers in different areas, I want to be clear in our thinking that this is a result of growing and developing ministries as a church, and indeed growth as a church. It is not a lack of volunteers, we have high numbers of people contributing to our shared mission and ministry, it is just that as we grow and develop we need more! This is a good and blessed challenge to have!

Our newly refurbished church continues to provide for us as both a spiritual home and as hub for community engagement. We rejoice in the increasing number of ways in which our much-loved building is utilized, not only by our congregation but also by various user groups within our community. We continue also to give thanks for those who envisioned and provided for it.

This past year has seen significant changes within our staff team, as we bid farewell to our beloved Rector, Chris Hill and Debbie, as they retired and also as Ruth New joined the Diocesan Team, though remaining as the Congregational leader for the 945 Team. We are currently in the process of recruiting to fill these vacancies, and though these changes to our staff team are keenly felt, it is important to emphasize the role our lay leaders and volunteers play, who are the true lifeblood of our ministry and mission, and because of whom, we have been able to continue to sustain the mission and ministry that has been given to us all as a church. Indeed, we have even seen growth in our outreach and pastoral ministries last year seeing the establishment of initiatives such as the Bereavement Cafe and Anna Chaplaincy.

At St Mary's, leadership is not confined to the staff team but is embraced and exercised by a diverse set of lay leaders who embody a significant sense of calling, vocation and service. As our congregations continue to grow, we are faced with new opportunities and challenges. Our recent congregational listening exercises have underscored the challenge of some of these changes but also served to remind us of the need to remain rooted in our shared sense of mission and of being one body; multiple congregations and plants, but one church. It has been so encouraging to have such enthusiastic participation and attendance at these

Congregational listening and discernment gatherings sessions across all congregations, a testament to the deep commitment and engagement of our members in the life of the church.

Looking ahead, we are hoping to reintroduce courses to deepen our collective understanding of faith and discipleship, with the Pilgrim course serving as a promising start. In the same vein we eagerly anticipate the upcoming adult baptisms at the end of April, symbolic of the ongoing growth and renewal within our community. These milestones serve as a testament to the transforming work of Christ among us, the power of faith and the enduring strength of our shared journey.

As you read the following reports, take a moment to notice the God's Hand at work in the midst of them, and let us continue together, with renewed faith and determination, that God is working out His purposes among us, strengthened by the bonds of our shared fellowship together in Christ, and the assurance of God's steadfast presence among us.

With much thanksgiving



Rev. Phil Marsh
Priest in charge

Market Day Communion *Canon Stephen Leeke*

Usually a little over 30 of us gather around God's Word and the Lord's Table. The service is seated, relatively simple, deep and sometimes profound. We have short but pithy readings and talk, a few easy worship songs, a bit of silence, reverent communion and an occasional laugh.

At the end we either go away spiritually refreshed, or stay for Coffee and a Chat to form the nucleus of the Thursday morning community. We welcome new members and occasional members. Our numbers are usually boosted on special days like Ascension Day.

It is a joy for me to lead this lovely, lively and loyal fellowship.

ChristChurch *Graham Biss*

In last year's PCC and APCM report, we reported a number of challenges faced by ChristChurch. The first was around how we reach into North Ely, given the challenges of slower than expected development and a lack of interest in the ChristChurch Sunday presence. The second and third were both in relation to resourcing, more generally and then directly in relation to the departure of Chris and Debbie Hill.

These areas of engagement have marked the last year in the life of ChristChurch. Much of our previous reports remains the case. We have continued:

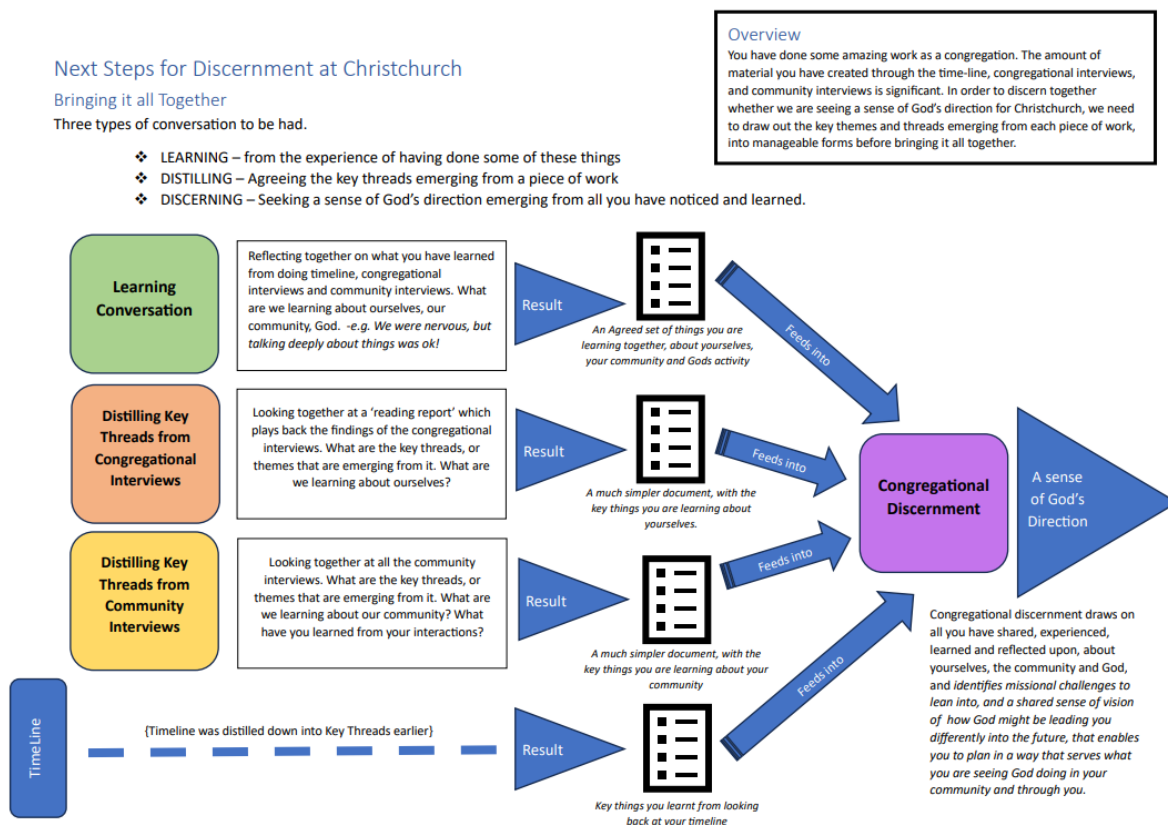
- to meet at 4pm in the Isle of Ely Primary School throughout the last year with a focus on hospitality, accessible worship, and space for discussion.

- to experiment with creative ways to worship, including worshipping outside in the Isle of Ely School wild garden once a month over summer.
- to visit the Orchards each month, now led by Yvonne Biss (ALM)
- to host community events. In May a street party for the King's coronation, a small pop-up event at Harvest, and carols at the Orchards over Christmas.
- to support the Isle of Ely Primary School, predominantly through engagement with the wild garden, led by Graham Biss (LLM).
- to develop all members of the congregation in leadership and service.

While there have been no major changes, there have been some noticeable shifts in culture relating to our discernment process. The first has been the way in which a number of people have stepped into leading services and preaching this year, with support from Ruth Holmes, Graham, Yvonne, and Phil, we have often used books to further support the teaching e.g. following Pete Grieg's book *How to Pray* and Selina Stone's Lent book *Tarry Awhile*. Chris Tomkies has been accepted to train as an LLM and Chelle George has applied to train as a Pastoral ALM. It feels like ChristChurch continues to be a training ground in which all of us are growing in our gifts and in confidence. Secondly, there has been more sharing between ChristChurch and St Mary's. A number of those from ChristChurch have enjoyed attending special services at St Mary's – for example, Ash Wednesday – and engaged with pastoral training or the Lent Course.

Discernment Process

Along this “business as usual” we have continued to embark with Phil's help on a period of discernment. This began with the timeline activity reported last year, then conversations within the congregation (conducted by Chris Tomkies), and then conversations with the community (conducted by various members of the congregation)



Finally, we gathered together over three Sundays and one Saturday morning in January and February 2024 to discern together what God was doing amongst us and how we might respond. The aim and output of these conversations are summed up in the diagram.

Following our final congregational discernment session in February, we arrived at a shared sense of direction. This is not a dramatic change for ChristChurch, but a re-orientation putting mission through building community in focus again and with the freedom for our Sunday worship to serve this sense of God's call on us. This sense of direction is: "We want to build community, founded upon knowing the love of Christ, through acts of service".

Our next steps are to start a conversation with those we have identified in the local area who are also wanting to build community. We will aim to work with these "people of peace" God is giving us to experiment with some ways to serve North Ely. Within our discernment we had a sense that God was giving us freedom to think more widely than simply the Orchards Estate development itself, and to be open to anyone looking to build community with ChristChurch. We have agreed that Sunday services will serve this sense of direction and have committed to keep on reflecting, praying, and discerning together. One notable outcome of this process has been a marked shift in people's sense of ownership of Christchurch.

PCC *Barbara Walker, PCC Lay Vice Chair*

The period since the APCM of 2023 has been significant in many areas:

Vacancy and recruitment of Priest in Charge.

The Deanery Plan and proposed changes to the Ely Team, which have not yet been agreed.

Conversations and meetings with all the congregations at St Mary's/ChristChurch to discern the way forward.

Funding and recruiting a Team Vicar.

Plans to recruit to the Lay Post which has been vacant.

This year in particular, I believe, has seen the empowering of the congregations both to listen to each other and voice their opinions. This empowerment has also extended to the congregations becoming more involved in the daily activities to reach out to the local community. One example of this is the Open Space on Wednesday mornings providing a warm, friendly environment with refreshments and an opportunity to chat with others.

Greater numbers of the congregation are becoming involved in the daily running of the church with Warden Teams being formed to spread the workload more widely.

There is also greater participation within the PCC; members are being asked to review policies and present them for approval. PCC members have risen to the challenge of busy meetings including the need to read and absorb a considerable number of documents. Indeed, an additional PCC meeting was arranged in February to finish work which could not be completed within the usual schedule.

Overall, a good year with a positive outlook ahead.

Last year my report emphasised the new – new worship space, new equipment, new services and new team members. This year has therefore been a time of growth and learning.

Firstly, we have been learning about the new equipment and how to get the best out of it. Tim Smith has put a great deal of effort into resolving issues with our audio systems, and I have been working alongside Paul Smyth to identify the best presentation software for our machines and to expand our ability to stream services to the internet. We have provided a streaming service for several funerals this year, and also for some training events run by the Diocese of Ely. It is hoped this year to also be able to supplement our online service provision with some “live streamed” services.

During the Autumn term I worked with the leadership team to develop a series of training sessions. In these meetings those involved or wanting to be involved in leading our musical worship discussed a series of topics.

1. What is a “Worship Leader”? Looking at the reason for worship leaders, what are the expectations, the good bits and the bad bits!
2. The structure of a service and our place in it. The place of liturgy, the “shape” of our worship and the role of the Holy Spirit.
3. The band. Building and leading a team of musicians and singers.
4. Preparation and planning. Communications with the service leader, the preacher, the band before a service.
5. Going Live. Interaction with the congregation, the leaders and the band.

These sessions were based on focussed discussion, and occasionally practical activities (and cake). As a result of these sessions, it was encouraging that we were able to expand the leaders of our sung worship, thus providing a more diverse approach to the music (and some time off for me).

The worship leaders’ team is now

Eight15 – Constance Heald

Nine45 service – Emmie Smith, Paul MacLellan, Dan Morley

Eleven15 service – Mike Roca-Terry, Andy Sykes, Matt Whittle, Katy Roe

Eleven15 Service Song statistics 2023

135 individual songs sung in 266 singing opportunities.

11 Most Sung	
Come let us worship the King of Kings	7
A Thousand Hallelujahs	6
The Lord's My Shepherd	5
In Christ Alone	5
How Deep The Father's Love For Us	5
Hosanna (Praise is rising)	5
Come people of the risen King	5
Come Now is the Time	5
Blessed be Your name	5
Be Thou My Vision	5
10,000 Reasons	5

Decade	Songs Sung
(C) Free	36
1920	1
1940	1
1970	2
1980	18
1990	59
2000	79
2010	57
2020	13

AV Developments *Tim Smith*

Since our last update:

- We have dealt with a number of core system setup issues. This has put us on a level footing, enabling us to make changes to each of the services without issue
- Changed the way the speakers are processed, removing the bass speakers for all service settings for spoken word.
- Arranged for the loan of a possible alternative to the fixed lectern microphones, these will be installed w.b. 25th ahead of Easter and will be evaluated over the coming month or so.
- Finalised and simplified the different service settings in the sound console, introducing dedicated settings for each service configuration and worship group
- Protected the configurations in the core system and sound console to stop inadvertent changes being made.
- Created draft 'crib sheets' and training materials for both the 'basic' and 'advanced' systems in readiness for refresher training for all system users after Easter.
- Cleared and organised the chancel store to make way for the storage of tables.

It has been great to see the team grow in confidence as the state of the system has become more predictable, allowing them to better serve the congregations, service leaders and worship groups in the provision of sound on Sunday mornings.

There is still plenty to do, we look forward to the next few months where we will continue to make incremental improvements in audio delivery in the space and run a couple of training sessions for existing and new operators

Visuals *Paul Smyth*

Full paper-free services have continued to be supported at both the Eight15 and Eleven15 Sunday services throughout the year. Starting in February 2024, we have been introducing visual elements to the Nine45 Sunday services. Currently this excludes words for the songs, as we seek to explore the optimum setup for the band with the portable screens. The portable screens are a recent addition to our equipment. They provide greater flexibility for how we configure the church for our services. They have also been used to enhance the experience at the Eight15 service for those attendees who find looking up the main screen too much of a strain on their necks. The screens are regularly used at funeral services particularly for presenting a montage of the person's life at the beginning and end of the services. The screens are also used to support aspects of our outreach activities e.g. CSI Easter with our local primary schools.

Some limited use of streaming for funeral services has been introduced when requested. These streamed services are not publicly available. They are restricted to only those whom the bereaved choose to provide access.

Looking forward we plan to:

- move to full paper free services for the Nine45 Sunday services;
- start delivering the Eleven15 as a streamed service to replace our current online offering and

- enhance the use of visuals at our Nine45 and Eleven15 services to provide more contemporary presentation styles.

Jointly with the Worship team we are exploring alternative presentation software that enables a far more collaborative form of working across the many teams that create and support our services. We are blessed with a small but reliable visuals team who support all our current activities. They are keen to explore further routes to enhance our worship and our appeal to newcomers.

Thankfully, we are blessed with generally trouble-free equipment. The main screen can blank out for a few seconds during the first hour of use. This problem is not understood by the team or our supplier but does not have a significant impact. The system includes two cameras allowing very flexible coverage of any activity in the church. Due to delays in the propagation of the pictures to the screens we do not regularly use these in our services. However, these issues will not impact their use for streaming activities.

Prayer *Sue Morley*

We have at St. Mary's various ways in which to offer prayer for anyone making a request. On a Sunday morning prayer ministry has been reintroduced at all of our services. We have been able to pray with people after the Eight15 and Eleven15 but not so much yet at the Nine45 service. I am hoping that more people will come forward to help with this ministry and more people will take the opportunity to be prayed for.

The WhatsApp group has continued during the year being led by Paul Smyth after Chris Hill's departure. This consists of worship, confession, bible readings and prayer.

The prayer chain is available for urgent prayer requests (prayerchain@stmarysely.org) and has a group of people who can start to pray straight away.

Home Prayer Warriors is a termly sheet sent to anyone wishing to pray at home for the life of St. Mary's and Christchurch. It is hoped that more people will join this group. You can sign up at any time.

The prayer box in the prayer corner was used frequently during the time the church was open by visitors and the congregation. Sometimes just saying thank you for answering prayers.

Pastoral Care *Katy Coutts, Pastoral Team Pastor*

In 2022, following a church listening exercise led by Phil, the PCC identified reconnecting with one another post-Covid as one of our five top priorities as a church. In 2023, following our move back into the church building at the end of 2022, the Pastoral Team, led by myself and Ruth Holmes, set about seeing how we could help to make that a reality. As a result, we had a very busy year; below are brief details about some of the things members of the Pastoral Team were involved in alongside the ongoing work of visiting, listening to and caring for members of St Mary's and those we came into contact with this year:

- Training courses on Listening, Prayer and Dementia Awareness were run in the church rooms, together with a 3-hour online course on Bereavement Care Awareness. These were all well attended and appreciated.
- Bereavement care: The Bereavement Café started in January and met on the last Wednesday of every month in the Lady Chapel alongside Open Space; this continues into 2024. We had 15-20 guests each month – some of these became regulars, some came occasionally, and one or two newcomers turned up most months. Some were church members, some were not. A small team of helpers worked hard to provide a consistent, safe and welcoming environment where difficult feelings and situations could be talked about and problems shared. We also ran a Remembering Service in November for all who had had funerals taken by our clergy during the year, and a Blue Christmas service in December – I hope they will both be repeated in 2024.
- Work in care homes, which had to stop during Covid, resumed this year. Two members of our congregations, Beth Georgiou and Maria Ellis, were commissioned as Anna Chaplains during the year and worked alongside Ruth at Lily House and Vera James House, taking services and talking to the residents. Later in the year Beth turned her attention to caring for the older members of St Mary's – this included organizing a very successful Harvest Service and lunch in October which raised over £600 for one of our church charities, the Climate Stewards cook stoves project in Nepal.
- Practical help: Simon Fraser was kept busy undertaking a variety of tasks for people who asked for his help, including gardening, sorting and clearing household items, transport and advocacy. He also acted as a link between church and the social prescriber at St Mary's Surgery and with various other things going on in Ely.
- Irene Dewsbury and her small team were able to resume taking Holy Communion once a month to the people on their list. Although this is only a small number (it often increases during the winter months), it represents quite a commitment of time and care as many of these people have ongoing and often complicated health and other problems which their visitors get involved in trying to help with.
- Led by Margaret Graves and Sarah Lorden, two of our ALMs, many people continued to do a huge amount of visiting, particularly of the sick and those in particular need.
- Sue Morley continued to look after the Prayer Corner in St Mary's and to head up our Prayer ministry team. This has not been an easy ministry to pick up since our return to the church building due to a smaller team and needing to learn how best to use the new building, but Sue kept things going and made sure that we didn't forget about this important part of our ministry to one another.
- Paul Woodbridge continued to oversee the weekly Thursday morning coffee team and to assist Janene Pike with Creative Minds once a month. Both the Market Day Communion service on a Thursday and coffee afterwards grew in numbers during the year, welcoming old and new members and groups from Highfields and Lily House, and it was great to have Creative Minds to invite some of our Open Space guests along to as well.
- Chris Watson continued to head up our hospitality team and produced high-quality refreshments for occasions like the Harvest lunch and the Remembering service. We would like to be able to put on more events like the Harvest lunch but that will require more helpers.

- Warm Space/Open Space: although this doesn't technically come under the Pastoral Team umbrella, the quality of the welcome and care extended by the team of nearly 20 volunteers to all who came to Warm Space (renamed Open Space after the winter) was exceptional. It culminated in a lunch for 50 people which took place on the Wednesday before Christmas – it was wonderful to be able to extend hospitality to so many and to see the church so full of strangers and friends, and strangers who have become friends.

The leaders of the various aspects of pastoral care at St Mary's meet every couple of months to share news and discuss items of interest. At one of these meetings I asked everyone to share one word which for them summed up 2023. 'Busy' and 'challenging' came up but also 'exciting' and 'positive' – and I think that about sums it up. Our lovely new church building and the hard work and enthusiasm of every member of the Pastoral Team enabled us to pick up and reconnect with most of what we were doing before Covid – but they also enabled us to reach out to the wider community and make new connections that weren't there before, and for all of that I thank God.

Anna Chaplaincy

Beth Georgiou, Anna Chaplain & Rev Ruth Holmes



Anna Chaplaincy (AC) is a way of supporting older people emotionally and spiritually. It is person-centred, non-judgmental, interdenominational ministry, for people of strong, little or no faith at all. It is a proven way of supporting people in later life in residential homes and in their own homes, as well as through community groups. AC began in Alton, Hampshire in 2010, but it was 2023 before it started in the Ely diocese. St Mary's Ely was one of the churches keen to take part. All Anna Chaplains are required to be commissioned under a licence agreement between their Diocese and the Bible Reading Fellowship (BRF). At St Mary's in Ely, this took place on 6 August 2023. We commissioned Beth Georgiou and Maria Parnell.

Care Home visiting. In 2023 St Mary's provided monthly services to Vera James, Lily House, Baird Lodge and ChristChurch visit The Orchards. We also gathered all those involved in Care Home ministry across Ely to share practice, to be repeated in 2024. For her ALM project, Beth compiled a file of suggestions for 12 services, with a Bible reading, prayers, hymns and a short talk. It is kept at St Mary's, and has enabled others to be easily involved in Care Home ministry.



Vera James: Beth leads accompanied by members of The Countess Free Church (CFC) Ely, including a musician. A chaplain from CFC also visited residents in their rooms on a different day each month to chat and share communion. In October we began church visits, escorting two residents to CFC, and since then the number has increased to 5-6. Highlights were attending a garden party, the remembrance service, and carols. Unfortunately changes in circumstances both for Vera James and for volunteers mean this will not continue throughout 2024.

Lily House: Maria Parnell leads with Rev Ruth (curate) and a team from St Mary's including a musician. Between 15 and 25 residents attend each month and we have seen a growth in relationship with staff members throughout 2023, including beginning to be asked to make

1:1 visits with residents. A group from Lily House attend the Market Day coffee from time to time. One of the team also serves Lily House by leading a sing-a-long around once a month in addition to our service.

Baird Lodge: Rev Mike Banyard takes communion to Baird Lodge once each month.

The Orchards: Yvonne Biss leads with a team from ChristChurch and St Peter's. This will be covered in the ChristChurch report. Between 10 and 15 residents attend each month, and they attend the Market Day Communion and coffee morning.

St Mary's also facilitated a homegroup and monthly communion service at *Roslyn Court* (assisted retirement living). The homegroup is led by Paul Woodbridge and Rev Ruth took the communion at the start of 2023, before handing this ministry to Rev Ann Williams at St Peter's. Paul and others continue to support this service.

We were also contacted in December 2023 by Lavender House, the communal space for those living in Sanctuary Housing properties. We were unable to provide a carol service, but Beth, Rev Ruth and Simon Fraser were able to visit and there is potential to develop partnership in the future.

Events...so far

Harvest Lunch: A Harvest service and sit-down lunch was provided for older people at St Mary's. About 90 people attended and £640 was raised for smokeless cooking stoves in Nepal, one of St Mary's charities.



Winter Party Saturday 13 January 2024 (though conceived and planned in 2023!). 79 guests attended including the Mayor & Mayoress of Ely enjoyed Bingo, a Quiz, refreshments and a sing song.



In the diocese and beyond...

Beth features in a video made by Ely Diocese Communications Officer Holli Bielby promoting Anna Chaplaincy in the diocese. Ely diocese also arrange Zoom meetings to connect our Anna Chaplains in the local area, which Beth has attended.

Anna Chaplaincy provides ongoing development and training, which Beth has taken advantage of this year. She attended the Anna Chaplaincy Gathering 2023 at High Leigh, the theme of which was 'Paying Attention'.

In September 2023, Maria began her training via the Spiritual Care Series (delivered in-person at St Mary's for a number of people around the diocese, including attendees from Little Thetford and Streatham) and completed this including safeguarding in February 2024.

Ely & District Christians Against Poverty (CAP) Project

*Derek Tye Chair – ELY CAP
Implementation Team*

Started by Christians Together in Ely (formerly Churches Together in Ely) in 2014, and based at St Mary's Church Ely, the Ely & District CAP Project is run by people from a number of local churches – Ely Cathedral, Countess Church Ely, Lighthouse Church Ely, Ely & Newmarket Methodist Circuit, The Ark Church Isleham, and St Mary's Church Ely.

Ely CAP Debt centre opened in 2017 and since then 210 people, who were in debt crisis, have benefitted from CAP's expertise with 68 becoming debt free. We currently operate for 2 days a week – Wednesday and Thursday.

Increase in demand

The prediction in our 2022 report that 2023 would see a further increase in demand for our services, sadly came to fruition. The year saw a 50% increase with 116 successful visits to clients. The good news is that we brought hope to 36 new clients, and that 17 of our clients became debt free.

Staffing

John Hocij has been the Debt Centre Manager and qualified debt coach since it opened in 2017, and is employed for 16 hours a week. He is ably supported by Pat Del Grazia who is a qualified debt coach, who volunteers for a day a week, and Elizabeth Anderson who provides superb administrative support and is employed for 3-4 hours a week. In addition to this we have a small team of people who volunteer their time to accompany the debt coaches on visits to clients. Our considerable thanks to all these people for the wonderful service they give, and without whom Ely & District CAP couldn't operate.

Early in 2023 Chris Fry, who was also a qualified volunteer debt coach for a day a week, retired and moved to Suffolk. We thank Chris for all he accomplished in his 2 years with us and wish him every happiness in Suffolk.

Two other people who were instrumental in the formation of Ely & District CAP also moved away from Ely during the year. We give thanks for the guidance, encouragement and unstinting support given by Rev Chris Hill from St Mary's Church, and Rev Karl Relton from Countess Church over the last 9 years. Both were members of the Executive Team which oversees Ely & District CAP. We will miss them and wish them well for the future. Chris in his retirement, and Karl in his new ministry in Leicester.

The CAP Process

The process starts with the potential client calling the CAP national helpline 0800 328 0006. Each client is offered three visits which are usually spaced over 6-8 weeks. The first two visits are used to gather information on the client's financial situation, which is then sent to CAP. CAP assesses the client's ability to repay the debts over time, liaises with the companies and organisations the client owes money to, and stops them sending demands by letter, phone and any other means to the client. CAP negotiates a repayment programme with the company which is based on the client's available income.

CAP prepares a budget for the client to work with and if this is accepted by the client at the third visit, systems are set up for the client to begin repayments of their debts and to live within their means. Occasionally, because of the client's situation and the length of time it would take to repay debts, CAP will recommend the client considers forms of insolvency and will provide help and counselling for this.

Ely CAP Finances

Although the service is completely free of charge to the client, it costs £27,000 a year to run Ely & District CAP. Each year we wonder where the funds will come from. However, we have a great God who continues to bless the work of Ely CAP in amazing ways.

In 2023, the Churches named at the start of this report gave a total of £14,000. Donations and Gift Aid from individuals totalled £8,500 and an amazing Lego model show in St Mary's Church raised £4,800. The total income was £27,300! Praise God.

Children's Society *Irene Dewsbury, Chair Ely Committee, The Children's Society*

May I start by thanking St Marys for your continued support with a monthly payment and the use of the church and room to hold our fundraising activities.

The work of The Children's Society is continuing but is changing with the times, where they offer support to young people, showing the love of God and how this will be there for them. They know the need for support to young people with their mental health. The annual report, produced by TCS, The Good Childhood report identified that young people's mental health has been in decline for some years.

Therefore, something that is happening in 2024 is that TCS is opening a drop-in centre in Newnham for young people with mental health problems. Hopefully, this will be the first of others.

I was pleased to attend each of the Sunday services in October 2023 to promote The Children's Society. The focus being on a joint campaign with British Transport Police, County Lines and TCS asking everyone to "Look Closer". This campaign is still continuing, asking to report if transactions don't seem right.

What is God leading us to - the need to raise money is still needed but the fundraising will perhaps have to change. It is difficult to recruit younger people to help and the active members are becoming less active, but still committed.

To Kenya with Love Sally James Fry (on behalf of the UK Board of Trustees, To Kenya with Love) www.Tkwl.org.uk



In 2023, the purchase of land was completed (a very drawn out affair in Kenya!). The Junior High School will be built on this land and the build will begin during the long school holiday November to January 2023-2024 and is expected to take about two years due to financial constraints. As well as classrooms, this two-storey school will include a science lab, home tech room, library/computer suite, toilets and showers. There will be a ramp to the upper floor to provide disabled access.



At the beginning of 2023, the UK Trustees set a fundraising target of £20,000. I'm delighted to report that a total of £20,922 was raised. We have written a Financial Reserve Policy and are aiming to have a financial reserve of £18,000 for 2024. To give some context, £11,000 is sent every month to fund the charity's activities in Kenya.

Students complete High School each November but have to wait until the following September to begin college or university courses.

A large city church (CITAM – Christ Is The Answer Ministries) provides a 10 week course for all our sponsored ex High School students to help prepare them for college or university life. We currently have 14 students attending this course which includes social skills, healthy living, financial management, careers guidance and aims to strengthen their faith in God. In addition to the above, each December during the long holiday, a week-long mentorship course is run by CITAM at our school (Simon Newberry School) and is offered to the older students in our school and all college and university students. In December 2023, over 100 students attended and covered similar topics to those attending the above course.



We feel it is essential to teach the students in order to equip them to avoid such things as teenage pregnancy and drug involvement, so rife in the local economically deprived community.

Chris and Sally Fry have just spent a week at the school (March 11-18th 2024). Chris has been doing maintenance and repair work and Sally is involved with lots of meetings in her role as a Trustee, overseeing the work as well as training the teachers in using synthetic phonics to teach reading.

We are currently seeking sponsorship for fifteen children, ten of which joined the nursery as three-year-olds. The others need sponsorship because their sponsors have finished.

I would like to take this opportunity to thank the PCC for its much-appreciated financial support over several years. You have helped make a difference to many lives.

Turkish Earthquake Appeal *Piers Coutts*

In February, in response to the severe earthquake in Turkey, we launched an appeal to support the victims. Just under £4,000 including gift aid was raised, and this was passed on to Tearfund to support their work with those affected. Many thanks to those who gave so generously to this special appeal.

Climate Stewards Cook Stoves *Paul Smyth & Lindsay Frost*

Early in 2022, the PCC enhanced its criteria for charitable giving to include supporting a range of charities based on the 5 Marks of Mission. On this basis, a review of our then current charities indicated that we were not covering “Mark 5 **Treasure: To strive to safeguard the integrity of creation and sustain and renew the life of the earth**”. The then Charity and Green teams proposed the Climate Stewards charity and specifically their Nepal Smokeless Metal Stoves project. Climate Stewards is an explicitly Christian charity. Whilst this is not a pre-requisite of PCC support, many PCC members have a strong preference for supporting Christian charities. The PCC has continued to include this charity in its set of supported charities for 2023 and 2024.

The Nepal Smokeless Stoves significantly reduce the carbon consumption of villagers in remote, mountainous communities in north-western Nepal. This reduces local deforestation. In addition, they provide significant health benefits to the villagers and reduce the burden of work on the villages’ women and girls. Climate Stewards use local partners, in this case RIDS-Nepal to promote and deliver their projects. They are seeking to improve on traditional methods rather than looking to introduce alien ideas into the local settings. Climate Stewards specifically seek to scientifically measure the impact of each project from both environmental and health perspectives. Some people regard this approach as an inappropriate overhead. However, the promoters of this charity, within the PCC, felt that this means that the benefits of the scheme are clear. Further, this charity illustrates the real-world challenges of trying to reduce human impact in remote traditional settings where grandiose mega projects are totally inappropriate.

Each of our supported charities was actively promoted throughout the church activities last October. A traditional harvest service followed by a harvest lunch was held in aid of the Cook Stoves project raising £1,000. Apart from these October events, promotion of each of our charities to our congregations has not been significantly resourced. In the coming year we need to raise the profile of our supported charities and substantially increase the awareness and involvement from our congregations.

Under Ones *Ruth Holmes*

Under Ones continues to take place each Monday from 10am until 11:30am. We break for bank holidays but continue through school term times where possible. This year we have had a peak of 30 families, and we usually welcome around 12 families each week. Adults

often include dads and grandparents as well as mums. Over the summer months while numbers were very large, we met in the church but have moved during colder months into the church rooms. This works with smaller numbers. It has been helpful to have toys organised and kept in the side chapel cupboard, which feels more accessible than the cupboard in the church rooms. During the session, we welcome the family and provide refreshments. Towards the end we have a time of singing and we ask parents to help with wiping toys where possible. Both of these things help with the element of building community.

As with many of our ministries, the quality of what we do at Under Ones relies on having enough volunteers. The team is currently five regulars with Ruth Holmes, and it would be helpful to have one more permanent team member as well as a new families worker. The team have reflected that smaller numbers do help with building relationship and community, which we want to keep at the heart of this ministry.

Under 5's *Marilyn Sykes*

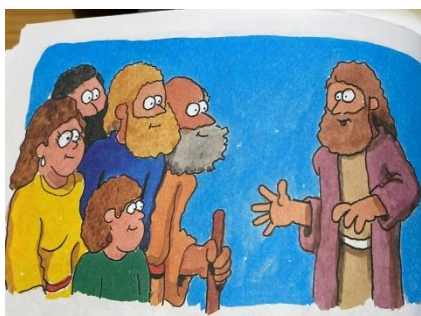


Under 5's continues to grow and is well attended by between 30 and 40 families each Tuesday morning during term time.

We start with free play. Refreshments for both the adults and children and are available all morning.

At 10:00am we share a story which is usually shown on the big screen and on one of the televisions. After the story there is always, a craft activity related to the story and more free play.

At 10:45 we play the tidy up song, everybody helps to tidy away the toys, and then we end the session with songs where the children can play percussion instruments along with the singing.



We plan our stories carefully and they are often seasonal or relate to a Bible story.

We continue to celebrate the church festivals of Easter, Harvest and Christmas. At Easter we give each child a small Easter Egg and at Christmas a copy of the Christmas Story. We also had pancakes on Shrove Tuesday!

Each term we enjoy a little picnic together after the last session.

We also support the Ely Food Bank with collections at each of the festivals.

We are a small team but each of us plays a big part in welcoming the families and making each session a success. We all make time to chat with the adults who bring their children along to play and we have enjoyed seeing lots of friendships form between the families.

JAM Packed: Nurturing Young Faith

Phil Marsh

Throughout the past year, Jam Packed has continued to be a nurturing space for our young members, operating very much as a Home Group for the children of the church and their friends. We as leaders often are as inspired by the children's reflections as we hope they are with ours! Currently, we are delighted to welcome between 10 and 12 regular children each week, with an open invitation extended to their friends, fostering a sense of inclusivity and community.

Our gathering provides a warm environment where children engage in a variety of activities, from enjoying toast, {which remains an essential start to our sessions, catching up with each other's news}, to playing games, delving into Bible study, and embracing moments of prayer. This past year, our programming has evolved to incorporate thematic elements, with recent focus placed on the journey leading up to the crucifixion. Through these themes, we strive to ignite curiosity and encourage our young ones to explore the profound questions that shape their faith. Central to our mission is the cultivation of a deep and personal relationship with Jesus Christ, a cornerstone that anchors all our endeavours and guides our planning.

We've been glad to warmly welcomed Helen Dickinson and Fiona Doughton to our team this past year. Their contributions have enriched our programs and strengthened our ability to meet weekly. As we look ahead, we are excited to extend an invitation for one additional team member to join our ranks. If you feel called to contribute to the invaluable work of Jam Packed or wish to learn more about our ministry, we invite you to reach out to Kim Gabbitas, Helen Dickinson, Fiona Doughton, Phil Marsh, or Ruth James.

Pathfinders

Mandy Marsh, Dan Brown, Adella Charlton, Dan Morley



Our fabulous Pathfinder group continued to meet on Sunday evenings in the hall, with food cooked by our wonderful hospitality team. We increased our sessions back to 6-8pm in January 2024, and have had fantastic attendance- from our 20+ regulars. Some of the teams highlights from 2023:

- Inflatable night back in Feb 2023, to celebrate the reordering of the church- it was the most awesome night.
- Having Dan Morley back as a leader from Sept 23, after a year off, he missed us, and we welcomed him back.

- The beach trip- that became a day trip to Cambridge, due to train strikes etc. The team only found out at the station, thought on their feet, no pathfinder wanted to go home and were happy to give the new trip a whirl. They went to Jesus green for lunch, played French cricket, went swimming in Lido, punting, ice creams and wandered through town, finished meal at Nandos. Obviously, it wasn't how we planned but the kids were so accommodating to the changes, and they all said how fun it was.
- In September 2023, one of our Pathfinders asked if there could be more opportunity to study the Bible together. So, Ruth Holmes (curate) and Heather Fletcher (one of our Pathfinder leaders) offered a Thursday after school Bible study in September and October going through Galatians. Two Pathfinders attended regularly and another popped in when available. Two others would have come were the sessions at a different time.



- The pathfinders wrapped over 300 presents for kidney patients on dialysis for the Addenbrookes Kidney Patients' Association.
- We have also had two Pathfinders ask to be baptised this year, and so offered the Pilgrim Course for Pathfinders. Ruth Holmes led this along with Pathfinder leaders, in Ruth's home and around food. We have three Pathfinders attending, two of whom will be getting baptised on Sunday 28th April.
- We continue to enjoy the ongoing saga of removing the pancake from the ceiling fan in the wooden floored hall.

We are looking forward to welcoming the new year 6 members for taster sessions in the summer term, and saying a fond farewell to our Pathfinders who are going to University. We are also looking to recruit people for our hospitality team and our youth leadership team- so watch this space. But please continue to pray for us as a team, for health, for time and continued encouragement. Please also continue to pray for our fabulous pathfinders and their families.

Ministry with Children at the Eleven15 *Gemma Brown*

Since moving from Bishop Woodford's house where we had an attendance of around 5 children at the eleven15 children's ministry, we now have ten children attending regularly, often 15 and sometimes more!

Successes:

- Growth in numbers (adults and children!)
- Key core team members who have supported this ministry since we started.
- Regular meetings and communication between the team means that we are constantly adapting and improving the sessions.

- We have some families whose attendance at church is built around the Sundays we are running children's ministry at the 11:15.
- After a recent drive to recruit more volunteers, we have had more come forward.
- The children are happy and keen to be at the sessions seen in the very regular attendees we have.
- Due to having a large age range (from 3 – 11) we have started to be together for the majority of the session but split into two groups so there is a more basic craft activity for the younger children and the older children work with an adult in a group to explore God's word at a deeper level.
- Weekly emails to parents summarizing what we have been learning about and any extra material to work on at home has helped to foster parental engagement.
- We are working on including the children more in the eleven15 service itself and are trying this on Palm Sunday where some of the children will be leading the prayers.

Next Steps:

- For the Sundays where there isn't any children's ministry, how can we engage the children? Some of the families go to the 9.45am on the weeks that the children's ministry is not available. We have talked about child friendly worship songs, flags for worship and activity for the children to do linked to the sermon that they are listening to.
- We always need more volunteers. Even though there is now a rota so there are two teams who take it in turns to run a session, it is still the same 3 core people who are planning and prepping.
- The children prefer the Sundays where there is children's ministry. There has been discussion about it running every week. This poses questions around how they would be able to still experience the format of the church service, be part of the congregation and how we would need more adult support.
- For those children who will soon be reaching secondary school age even if divided for the activities the main session will probably be too young for them. What provision can be put in place?
- Look further into our sessions following the Sunday service sermons.

Homegroups *Ruth Holmes*

Homegroups have continued to meet throughout this year. In April 2023, we said thank you to Chris and Maxine Brown as they stepped down from co-ordinating our homegroups while continuing to lead their own group. Ruth Holmes has been keeping an eye on homegroups in the meantime, while we have been discerning what might be right for the future. We have one new group, led by Marian Raikes, started in February 2024. Another group – led by Maxine and Chris Brown – has split into two venues this year. We have had at least ten new people join homegroups this year. The groups have continued to cover a variety of material, some following the sermon series offered by St Mary's and others choosing their own material. For the future, we will need new homegroup leaders and to reinstate training and encouragement for homegroup leaders.

Green Team *Ruth Holmes*

Having been awarded the Bronze Eco Church Award, the Green Team has been largely dormant this year due to Peter Whale's leaving. The team met in February 2024 to reconvene and discuss a way forward. Each team member has taken an area of the A Rocha "Eco Church" award scheme to look at, asking what we might be able to grow in as a church in those areas. We will also be suggesting that we move towards having "Green Ambassadors" who are part of the wider warden's team rather than a team who make everything happen. Ruth Holmes will hand this over to the church warden's when she leaves.

St Mary's Ely Bellingers *John Mitchell, Tower Secretary*

2023 was a notable year for the bellringers at St Mary's, our first full year back home after the disruption of the Covid years and BTP. We welcomed a number of visiting bands to ring at Ely and hosted a meeting of the local ringers Association. The Exercise enjoyed high visibility in 2023 via the national recruitment campaign to 'Ring for The King' at the Coronation in May. The St Mary's publicity machine (thank you Liz S) has kindly featured the ringers on several occasions in the local press which brought a number of enquiries from interested potential learners. This is all part of raising awareness of the revamped church amongst the community. Positive feedback has been received from the congregation and local community welcoming the return of the bells after the silence of lockdowns and the BTP. Good to know we were missed!

The band is currently stronger than for a long time, with the benefit of two returning experienced ringers plus two trainees all resulting from the recent publicity. Other inquirers have come to 'taste and see' but unfortunately were unable to commit to the learning curve. There is always room for more willing volunteers to learn and continue this ancient skill. It would also be good to find some trainees from 'inside' to grow the links between tower and nave.

With the support of the PCC, 2024 should also see us tackling some outstanding maintenance jobs to keep the bells ringing and hopefully improve the performance to listeners outside.



'St Mary's Ringers for The King 6 May 2023'

Be Still *Erin Coppin and Margaret Leeke*

Be Still has continued to be an important contemplative and creative prayer space for some members of the congregation, meeting monthly on the second Monday. The co-leaders, Margaret Leeke and Erin Coppin, are usually joined by 5 to 16 members of the congregation. In addition, three visiting speakers joined us: Richard Church spoke about Hidden Streams, Kathy Bishop led a session on Julian of Norwich and Helen Randall led us in Praying with Poetry. Ruth Holmes also led a session on imaginative contemplation. Erin Coppin led three meditative complines as well as a Lectio Divina session on our identity in Christ and a session on abiding in Jesus, using the Lectio Divina method and creative visualisation. Margaret Leeke led a session on the Pearls of Life, a Taizé session and an Advent meditation. Since Christmas, we have had more Taizé, another meditative compline and a Lenten labyrinth meditation. Although numbers are not large, there is a core of committed attendees who clearly find it deeply nourishing.

Creative Minds *Janene Pike*

Over the past 12 months, Creative Minds has continued to meet monthly on the 4th Monday afternoon of the month in the church hall. Numbers have varied but there is a core of people who attend. We have seen a number of new people as word has got around about Creative Minds. We might consider moving to twice a month (as before Covid), but that depends on appropriateness as we reflect on that possibility. It is a gentle, safe and friendly time and is especially suitable for those who perhaps want a quiet period to do art, chat as appropriate and drink tea and coffee. Overall, we feel God's blessing upon the group as we see people relaxing, enjoying the sessions and seeing the church as a place of welcome. We continue to promote positive mental wellbeing through art activities including: doodling, painting, zentangle etc., inspired by various themes. Simon and Anne-Marie have continued to contribute with a musical accompaniment which has been a relaxing part alongside the art. Pippin, a registered Pets as Therapy dog continues to join us to provide another therapeutic element and is a much-loved part of the group. We welcome everyone including those who don't see themselves as creative; it a non-judgemental space where anyone can have a go or just have a cup of tea.

Monday Club *Barry Scott*

The club meets every third Monday of the month in the church hall, except Bank holidays and August. Each meeting has a speaker followed by afternoon tea. One of the highlights of the year is our annual Carol Concert in the church followed by a Christmas tea; this year we had a very good attendance of members and guests. The service was led by the Rev Phil Marsh. During the year we have had a variety of visiting speakers, including Ely's mayor, Cllr. Chris Phillips and our Rural Dean, the Rev Canon Mark Haworth. By the time you read this there will be three meetings left in the current season: May is yet to be announced, June has a speaker on keeping safe, including information about scams. And July is a musical afternoon with Anne-Marie Burfield. Thank you to the committee and everyone who has supported the club.

St Mary's Mothers' Union *Joan Simper, Branch Leader*

The theme for 2023 was "Transformation – Now!", reaffirming members' commitment to support those in our communities in greatest need, and remaining focussed in faith and service to the MU vision of seeking for God's love to be shown through loving, respectful and flourishing relationships.

Branch Meetings were held monthly with a variety of speakers and social/fundraising events. At our AGM in January, Joan Simper was elected Branch Leader, Helen Dickinson – Treasurer and Freda Morrison – Secretary. We hosted the Ely Deanery Lady Day Service at St Mary's in March. Our Easter Reflection was led by Canon Jeremy James, and Revd Valerie Kilner led our September Holy Communion Service. There were talks from Paul Woodbridge; Revd Paula Spalding (Ely Diocese MU Chaplain); Sallyann Ford (Waterways Chaplain); Gwenda Kyd; Margaret Leeke; and the year concluded with a Christmas Social, including Seasonal Music and Verse from Jeremy & Ruth James. The Worldwide Day and Summer of Hope Tea Party raised £340 for MU Projects, and donations to AFIA and the Christmas Appeal were £275.

Monthly diocesan Thursday Prayer Meetings were held in Ely Cathedral and on Zoom, available to watch afterwards on our YouTube channel. Daily Midday Prayers were on Facebook, led by MU staff and other MU members around the country and worldwide.

The Diocesan Garden Party was held in July in the Bishop of Ely's garden, with the Bishop of Huntingdon, Dagmar Winter speaking. Together with donations and raffle proceeds, £186 was raised for MU Projects.

The Away From It All Holidays project (AFIA) for families in need, provided holidays for 12 families. Members also contributed to local refuges, hostels and Mary's Child with donations of goods, produce and knitted items.

In November a Banner Witness and Service at the Cathedral highlighted the "16 Days of Activism" against domestic and gender-based violence, an international campaign running annually in November/December, and supported by MU.

The Wave of Prayer for Ely Diocese was in December: members prayed for our link dioceses of Lusaka, Zambia; Shyogwe, Rwanda; Sokoto and Ikka, Nigeria; and Karimnager, India; plus Diocesan Links with Kigali and Vellore.

Thursday Refreshments *Paul Woodbridge*

The past year has seen a rise in the number of people coming for refreshments after the market day communion service. As well as a good number of people staying after the service, others come after 10.15 to meet others, chat and enjoy refreshments.

We took a decision to stop charging for refreshments a few months ago, in common with all the other events which take place at St Mary's. Various helpers kindly volunteer on a monthly basis to prepare drinks and biscuits. We could do with a few more!

Children come from Highfields School and also in the past year, folk have come from a couple of care homes, the Orchards and Lily House. The 'knit and natter' table has also grown in number.

We seek to provide a warm and welcoming set up where people can relax, chat and feel relaxed and at home.